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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SHANGHAI 000804

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [CH](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: NANJING: 70 YEARS AFTER THE MASSACRE

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A day after Nanjing commemorated the 70th Anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre, Poloff met with students, an academic, an official from the local Foreign Affairs Office (FAO) and visited the Nanjing Massacre Museum to discuss Japan and Sino-Japanese relations. Although the FAO official tried to downplay anti-Japanese sentiment in Nanjing, the university roundtable revealed deep-rooted feelings of anger and frustration towards a Japan that, according to the academic and students, has yet to come clean about its role in this tragedy. The academic and students also asserted the U.S.-Japan security alliance is a major obstacle to improving Sino-Japanese relations since, they believe, its main purpose is to "contain China." They urged the United States to push Japan into issuing a formal apology for the tragedy and compensating its victims and their surviving relatives. End Summary.

The Museum Reopens

¶2. (SBU) Nanjing commemorated the 70th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre on December 13, 2007 with a large ceremony at "The Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders" (Nanjing Massacre Museum). According to local newspaper reports and the museum's website, the event was attended by 8000 people, mostly Nanjing locals but also many survivors, Chinese from other areas, Buddhist monks, and various Japanese non-governmental organizations. A local FAO official told Poloff that he did "not see" any foreign government officials at the ceremony, though he did not explicitly state whether or not such officials had been invited.

¶3. (U) Poloff visited the museum on December 14, the first day it was reopened to the public after undergoing an 18-month renovation that tripled the size of its main exhibition hall. Military and police were on hand to control the large but orderly crowd of mostly Nanjing locals, varying in age from junior high school students to the elderly, who were lined up in a large outdoor open space waiting to enter the exhibition hall. The outdoor space, where the commemorative event had been held the previous day, highlighted grotesque bronze sculptures depicting the suffering of victims, the most vivid ones being a

large body-less head and a baby sucking on the breast of its dead mother. Large yellow wreaths from local government and military entities, local temples, and Japanese non-governmental organizations expressing condolences for the tragedy were placed along the perimeter.

14. (U) The mood inside the exhibition hall itself was somber and hushed, with very little talking despite the large number of visitors. The exhibition featured a chronological history of the events of December 1937, with an impressive array of historical artifacts including weapons and personal items used by Japanese soldiers, and foreign newspaper articles reporting on the Nanjing invasion. The exhibition also displayed many written and video-taped testimonials of victims, with graphic descriptions of their personal ordeals. Although most visitors appeared to take an active interest in these displays, the largest crowds gathered in front of the new, high-tech exhibits, such as one depicting a battle scene with holographic airplanes and bomb blasts superimposed on a miniature model of the city. The exhibits became increasingly graphic, with photos, videos, and life-size mannequins depicting the dead and wounded alongside written narratives describing the scenes. Although the visitors seemed transfixed by these graphic images, there was very little outward display of emotion with the exception of a couple of young schoolgirls, who appeared quite distraught.

15. (SBU) The exhibit continued with displays of "China's war of resistance," the most interesting being side by side photos of almost equal size of Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek, although Mao's photo in a triumphant pose appeared more flattering. The photos were accompanied by descriptions of how each leader contributed to the war of resistance. The narratives describing China's "victory" at the end displayed clear political overtones, with an analysis of the history of Taiwan's

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colonization by Japan and its "formal reversion" to China at the end of the war.

Government Stance: Anti-Japanese Sentiment Not That Bad

16. (C) Poloff met with a local FAO official to discuss these historical issues and their impact on current Sino-Japanese relations. The official downplayed anti-Japanese sentiment in Nanjing, acknowledging that it still exists but that such sentiment is becoming "less and less" as Chinese people focus on more tangible issues, like finding jobs. He emphasized that education is key to resolving longstanding historical issues, and Japanese textbooks should be revised to reflect "historical truths." But he believes the right wing "dominates" teachers' unions in Japan, so it would be difficult to revise textbooks. He also proposed that Japan allow more Chinese students and media to visit Japan in order to promote mutual understanding.

17. (C) Regarding the U.S. role in Sino-Japanese relations, the official asserted that the United States can exert "strong influence" on Japan on historical issues and insinuated that the United States could be doing more to push Japan into acknowledging and coming clean with its past. (Note: The FAO official studied in Japan for several years in the 1990s and is fluent in Japanese. He expressed his views rationally and without emotion, explaining that he has close, friendly relations with Japanese businessmen and government officials in China and has a personal interest in promoting better relations between the two countries. End note.)

Nanjing University Roundtable

18. (C) Poloff held a roundtable discussion about Sino-Japanese relations with Nanjing University Professor Liu Litao and five of his first year Asia-Pacific strategic relations graduate students. Liu opined that senior leaders in both Japan and China are just starting to "break the ice" in bilateral relations, with Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda proposing a trip

to China in the near future and Chinese President Hu possibly visiting Japan around April 2008. However, he cautioned that the level of mutual trust is still low, partly because the Chinese hear "lots of noise" from right-wing politicians in Japan exhorting anti-Chinese rhetoric. He was pessimistic about the impact of the recent Chinese naval visit to Japan, stating that although the Japanese and Chinese media hailed the visit as a positive step forward in bilateral relations, experts feel Japan did not approach the visit with the purest of intentions. Liu asserted that Japan had originally invited China's most advanced warship, purchased from Russia, in order to assess China's military capability, but were disappointed when China ended up sending a less advanced vessel. He also said that Chinese officials were miffed when they were refused a visit of Japan's advanced warship during the same visit, citing this as an example of the lack of mutual trust.

¶9. (C) Liu downplayed the historical issues at first, stating that it has become less of a problem in bilateral relations. He initially tried to avoid talking about this issue, instead speaking of other problems such as Japan's "invisible trade barrier" against Chinese food imports and both countries' "different interpretations" of their exclusive economic zones in the East China Sea. However, both he and the students kept reverting back to historical issues during the course of the discussion. They focused on the lack of mutual understanding and communication between the two countries. Although Nanjing University currently hosts several exchange students from 10 sister universities in Japan, the students acknowledged they have never spoken to Japanese students about these historical issues. They all revealed they have very little understanding of Japan, one student confessing that his knowledge of Japan comes from the Chinese media, government propaganda, and school.

¶10. (C) Several students stressed the need for more dialogue to promote understanding of each other's traditions and culture. One student stated the need to differentiate between the Japanese military and Japanese people when talking about Japan. All the students expressed an interest in visiting Japan, with one student talking about his friend's positive impressions during a recent visit to Japan. However, the students qualified

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these positive views by emphasizing that the key to improving relations is in Japan's hands. They stressed that the relationship cannot move forward fundamentally without Japan's "confession," formal apology and compensation for its historical transgressions. When asked how these feelings toward Japan have changed over generations, they described their grandparents' hatred for Japan because they either fought in the war or suffered through it, their parents' changing attitude due to the normalization of relations and influx of Japanese culture such as films, and their own mixed feelings towards Japan. The students stated they were first taught about the war when there were five or six years old and grew up hearing stories from their grandparents. Although they were interested in learning more about Japan, none expressed positive views of Japan. Several stated their feelings toward Japan were "not very good," partly due to the rise of right wing elements in Japan.

¶11. (C) Several of the students asked rhetorically, "How can Japan create a good strategic relationship with China while maintaining the U.S.-Japan alliance?" They asserted that the U.S.-Japan alliance's aim is to "contain China," with one student even stating that the alliance, not history, is the main obstacle to improving Sino-Japanese relations. Liu said that the U.S.-Japan alliance is causing a regional arms race, encouraging Japan to challenge its regional neighbors. He believes Japan's military capability is superior to China's since Japan procures advanced weapons from the United States, and China is "afraid" of Japan's offensive capability. He tied China's fear to the lack of mutual trust, ultimately stemming from unresolved historical issues. Liu and students strongly emphasized the need for the United States to push Japan to compensate war victims (comfort women and forced laborers), issue a formal apology, and honor the repayment of Japanese

bonds issued during the war. The academic ended by asserting the United States, as a world leader, has a "moral obligation" to push Japan in this direction.

Comment

¶12. (C) The Nanjing Massacre incident remains a sensitive, emotional topic for many Chinese, especially those living in Nanjing and those working for the Chinese Government. Nanjing FAO officials initially turned down all of Poloff's requests to attend the ceremony at the museum, meet with the academic and students at Nanjing University, and meet with another academic at the Nanjing Massacre Studies Center in Nanjing Normal University, citing the sensitivity of the topic as the reason for their refusal. In the end, after much prodding, they gave permission for Poloff only to meet with the Nanjing University academic. The student roundtable, also initially turned down, was a pleasant surprise organized on the spot by the academic.
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